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The Churches' Ministry to Workers

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"I THINK I know where labor has made its mistake," declared C. M. Moore, former president of Colorado State Federation of Labor, in Grace Community Church, Denver, Colorado May 7, 1922. "Labor has failed to have the dynamic of brotherhood. We have been too ready to use the strike and too frequently have failed to apply the Golden Rule by methods of conciliation. My greatest regret is that I did not know the possibilities of Christianity for human emancipation. Had I but known, my twenty years of service in the labor world would have been much more effective." The vast congregation thundered their approval when he concluded.

Organized labor constitutes the greatest untouched field that Christianity has in America. If a prophet should arise and tell of a foreign field of twenty millions of folks who are untouched by the Church, instantly appeals would be made and a statesmanlike program outlined. Yet in the ecclesiastical world there is not an intelligent effort being made by any denomination to reach the labor group as such.

Ministers elbow each other trying to be popular with business circles. There is a great waiting list of pastors seeking admission to business men's clubs. Yet in the average city it is safe to state that 90 per cent of the ministers have never been inside of a union hall.

It is not necessary for a Church to maintain a bias toward labor to reach this group. Labor does not usually ask for special privilege. They want equal consideration. In some instances, where the industrial conflict has been

bitter, it is absolutely essential for the Church to face the facts and send chaplains to both armies.

No Church emphasizing a denominational appeal can successfully reach the labor group. There is no church in America but would be glad to receive labor into its folds for what labor could do for the Church. *The Great Need is for the Church to Challenge the Labor World for What We Can Do for Labor.*

WHAT TO DO

The message of the Church must be very simple and clear cut. First we must place the child in its midst. We must insist that the first consideration for industry, government and society in general is a square deal for the child. Any conditions which prevent the fullest possible development of childhood are positively antichristian and should be condemned unsparingly. With but one per cent of our young people in college during the period of the greatest mental activity, viz., from sixteen to twenty-four years of age, our industrial situation is full of complexity. Most of labor's sins can be charged to under-schooling of its leaders. If the Church does not stand for abundant life for all children its message is a farce and will be repudiated by the millions of workers.

The Church must know its community. How otherwise can it minister to a group, whose needs it does not know? It should support every civic agency that is building the manhood of its constituency. It must denounce as unchristian every organization and custom which cramps or dwarfs human personality.

If a Church is to reach workingmen it must go to them. Union halls are open to the public. Every ministerial association should send a fraternal delegate to the central labor body. This has frequently been done. But has the Church been as urgent in requesting labor to send fraternal delegates to ecclesiastical meetings?

If the leader should meet with either insult or rebuff he should manifest a patient Christian spirit. Let him reflect that for twenty years most of the pastors reported in the press have been antagonistic to organized labor. Labor has been alienated for thirty years and it cannot be won back in a few weeks. Labor is doing the fair thing if it puts the Church on trial. Let the Church welcome investigation as to the fairness of its attitudes on industrial matters.

How to Do It

The rank and file of labor are not aware that the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish Sects have declared themselves on industrial problems. The reading of these statements will always produce an electrical effect. The Church will fail (and it ought to fail) if it offers a program to labor with anything but an unselfish desire to aid in the struggle for a better world.

No question arouses the ire of the writer more than "what gain has your Church received as a result of your activities in the labor world?" Shades of Him who took the Towel! Has profit so gripped the world that even the Church will not lose its life in order to find it? Any selfish desire on the part of the Church will doom any program presented to labor. That is just exactly what laborers are suspicious of.

The Open Forum Movement presents the best means of reaching the labor world. If there is no open forum in a city by all means make the forum a community organization.

The Denver Open Forum is operated by a Committee of One Hundred. Fifty of these are delegates from as many labor bodies. The other fifty include the Governor of Colorado, the Mayor of Denver, representatives from the American Legion, Parent-Teachers' Association, Woman's Clubs, Teachers' Associations, each denomination, etc.

Visiting over one hundred unions in appealing for free speech and open discussion which the Forum provides proved to be an ideal introduction to the labor world. Our Forum operates from October to March inclusive on Sunday afternoons. It is held in the church auditorium. Announcements are welcomed by labor organizations. One half the audience is from this group. They have frequently sent liberal contributions for the support of the Forum.

In the Forum several leaders of various types of religious movements have appeared as speakers. The result has been that the keenest leader of Denver radicalism stated publicly: "The Church is the best friend labor and the liberal movement has."

Community crises are opportunities for the Church to demonstrate its power of reconciliation. The first time that Jews, Catholics and Protestants ever united in Denver was to obtain the facts in the Denver tramway strike. This did more to bridge the gap between capital and labor than anything that has occurred in a generation.

Churches should seek to put their property at the service of the labor movement as well as of other civic bodies. A hotel refused labor its auditorium for the purpose of presenting its views on the open shop. Grace Church instantly offered its auditorium, realizing that free speech was at stake.

Churches with adequate equipment

for religious education are in splendid position to house the new Labor-Educational Movement. What labor will be tomorrow depends upon the ideas of the younger group. Left to chance they may be noisily and inefficiently radical with no balance to prepare them to assume a greater management in industry. What avail would political or direct action be if by securing direction of industry they found themselves unable to manage it? The British Labor Movement realizes that to be given control of the industries today would be disastrous. They have not enough trained executives.

Employing groups are welcoming this new educational movement. It is making more efficient workers and gives the employer a more broad-minded group with which to bargain collectively. In Denver, under the leadership of Rev. C. C. Webber, a Labor College has been started. The men insisted that Grace Church was the best meeting-place in the city. The second semester saw a doubled enrollment.

During the strike of the packing house employees, a group of pastors organized an extension of the Labor College and went to the strikers' hall every day and taught the men who otherwise would have been idle. Various subjects were discussed. To behold four hundred men studying international problems for an hour at a time instead of rumbling discontent, is a new spectacle in the labor world.

Labor evangelism is still in its infancy. Men like Dr. Harry F. Ward, Charles Stelzle or J. Stitt Wilson can attract thousands of toilers to a course of lectures. Were this done by local pastors either individually or collectively the harvest would be enormous. Last winter a church in Denver put on a course of four lectures for

labor and the church was crowded. Even a blizzard did not dampen their ardor. At the conclusion the crowd requested the pastor to make it an annual affair.

Men's Adult Bible Classes can do a splendid piece of work by inviting labor leaders to address them and then inviting the particular organizations to which these men belong to attend and hear them. The labor group not infrequently invites ministers to address them with the hope of awakening the preacher to their problems. Let the Church reverse the process.

The labor world needs and craves social life. The churches have not in the past furnished this. We have been too busy uttering condemnations of improper amusements to take time to afford clean and wholesome recreation. A community house is a necessity to every city church. Why permit the play life of young people to be commercialized? It is as sacred as their educational life. It plays just as great a part in their character formation and general development. Last year in the community activities of Grace Church over seventy-six thousand young people were ministered to.

The church school has an opportunity to form groups from men and women who are not affiliated with any church group. Let them discuss their own ideals in the light of Christian principles. Many a so-called agnostic has declared in our Open Forum Men's Bible Class: "I believe in Christianity of the kind this class advocates as much as any member."

The Church has done too much talking and too little listening. The masses today know what they want. The Church would do well to stop and listen to them. Dr. Gordon's church in San Francisco is crowded Wednesday evenings because he answers questions that the people propound to him.

The Church must be careful that it practices its own social creed in its relationship as an employer or purchaser. But a fraction of church publications bear the 'union label. Not many churches employ union labor. It would pay vast dividends, however, if the Church would begin intelligently to lead the way in the practice of its social ideals.

Contrary to general and prevailing opinion, the labor group does not want its sins ignored. It loves a two-fisted personality. It has a keen sense of humor. Hold up its faults in caricature and you will instantly obtain a response. Whatever else labor may be, it is *not* sensitive. It will take more criticism joyfully than any existing organization. It criticises itself more frequently and vigorously than any other group. Let any preacher announce for two weeks that he will preach on "What's the Matter with Organized Labor," send an invitation to the labor groups and he will have a full house—mostly workers. Let him reverse the process and announce he will speak on "What's the Matter with Business," invite the Chamber of Commerce, and see how many leading business men are searching for the light!

A GOOD WILL COUNCIL

The greatest field for church activity is in that of conciliation. Herbert Hoover said recently in Denver, after trying to adjust the water claims of various states in the Colorado River basin, "this is no job for an engineer, it is a task for an evangelist."

The day is rapidly approaching when the industrial engineers will recognize the need of good will in the settling of industrial disputes. Put human souls ahead of other considerations and labor disputes can soon be amicably adjusted.

In December 1920, after an appeal by a minister the Denver Trades and Labor Assembly passed the following resolution:

Whereas, capital and labor are rapidly drifting toward a condition of industrial warfare which will be disastrous to the general welfare of America, and,

Whereas, we believe that it is the duty of men to reason together rather than to blindly seek selfish advantage, and

Whereas, labor is willing to rest its case upon the application of the Golden Rule and the teachings of the Carpenter of Nazareth; therefore

Be It Resolved, That we, The Trades and Labor Assembly of Denver, invite the employers of Denver, to appoint a committee of six members to meet with representatives of the Trades and Labor Assembly and form a Good Will Council. This body shall select a thirteenth man by mutual agreement to be the presiding officer. We suggest that this Good Will Council meet every two weeks. To this body any industrial dispute or difficulty may be referred.

After slumbering in the archives of the Chamber of Commerce for a year, this resolution was brought to the attention of the members by this minister. The members demanded action. The committee approved. It may mean the beginning of a new era in the industrial world.

Labor is changing its attitude toward the Church. Frank Morrison recently stated that the Church was the only organized body which had consistently stood for collective bargaining during the so-called Open Shop Movement. To arouse the dormant spiritual impulse underlying the labor world is surely a task with which to challenge our Christian young people. All over the West, college men are responding to the appeal for a new type of ministry in behalf of the common people. We have known men to sacrifice three months pay during a sympathetic strike. It may be foolish and quixotic,

but of such daring was the program of the Man of Galilee.

Grace Church has over two hundred members of organized labor on her roll as members. Many are on her Official Board. The response is growing all the time. If Vanderlip and Schwab are correct in stating that the future will see the direction of industry come more and more into the hands of the labor group, the Church must face this fact or pay the price in the tomorrow.

The conclusion of *The Inside of the Cup* is being challenged today. Men do not have to sell their souls to remain in the ministry. The Eldon Parrs of yesterday are not as essential even as figureheads as they were. The Church is supported by the masses. The man on the outside will listen to the voice of a daring prophet fighting with a religious passion for social justice. The Church must save the people or make way for a religious organization that will.